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The Faith Factor: New Testament Cosmology in its Historical Context

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Thinkers have been struggling with issues of scientific empiricism and mysterious beginnings for millennia. The so-called “myths” of creation found in every culture under the sun did not evolve vacuously, but are the direct results of humans seeking an answer to the question of origins. Not all cultures have been as fortunate as the western philosophical tradition in recording and preserving their trajectory of thought.¹ History bears witness that the quest to know the unknowable continues to haunt scientists and philosophers of the western hemisphere who forever believe that the elusive answers are within empirical grasp.

The main purpose of this essay is to investigate the New Testament writers’ treatment of the Genesis account of creation. Taking into account that the New Testament world was part of a larger socio-cultural environment, the essay commences with a brief overview of Greco-Roman discussions about beginnings. It will be seen that many of the Hellenistic philosophers took a scientific approach in their quest to discover the truth about the beginnings. However, despite the various scientific theories that circulated during the early Christian period, the New Testament writers chose to ground their cosmology in the propositional statements recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. They fully understood that the rejection of a seemingly simplistic declaration of a literal six-day creation would simply mean shifting faith from the Bible to Aristotle, Philo, Lucretius, Galenus, or any number of cosmologists. When it comes to questions on the origins of the universe, it is impossible to escape the faith factor.

Cosmological Theories in the New Testament World

By the time of the New Testament, philosophical discussions about the beginnings of reality had been well underway for several centuries. According to

¹ Cf. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1961).

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Aristotle, Anaximander was first among philosophers to struggle with issues of beginnings as he came to grips with the limits of physical science as a tool for understanding the empirical world.² The Pythagorean school felt that the answer lay in mathematics and proposed that the beginning of all things must be found in “number”—the foundation of all things.³ Anaximander and Pythagoras are grouped among the “noetics,” a term used to describe those who understood the world “on the basis of a logical principal, a ‘beginning’.”⁴ These were opposed by certain natural philosophers who took seriously the constant change in the empirical world and questioned the validity of the notion of a “beginning.”

Later thinkers did not view the situation in terms of “either-or.” For instance, Anaxagoras recognized the reality of motion and change while reasoning that there must be a beginning to motion. His observations led him to conclude that there must be two worlds: an *empirical* one in which observation was possible and a *noetic* world that was beyond observation. Nonetheless, reflection on the noetic world had to start with the empirical one. Socrates built on Anaxagoras’ work and proposed that the problem of linking the empirical world with the noetic one could be bridged when it is recognized that *life* is the real force behind motion and change. Hence, the beginning of the empirical world can be directly attributed to *soul*, which serves as the intermediary between the two worlds. Socrates’ teacher, Plato, also toyed with the idea of a universal soul and developed a theology of beginnings in his work *Timaeus*. The conversation continued with Aristotle, who pointed to deficiencies in Plato’s religious approach (in *Timaeus*)⁵ and called for a return to scientific observation.⁶ He was particularly drawn to Anaxagoras’ principle of causality, upon which he posited that the beginning of everything in the empirical world must be attributed to the “unmoved mover.” Aristotle arrived at this conclusion by reasoning that the empirical world was based on objective truth, hence there must be a source of infinite truth which could not be moved but was the cause of all movement.⁷

Ehrhardt notices that after Aristotle, contemplative philosophy gave way to pragmatic philosophy, which led to the subordination of the preoccupation with

² For a full discussion see Arnold Ehrhardt, *The Beginning: A Study in the Greek Philosophical Approach to the Concept of Creation from Anaximander to St. John* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968).

³ See discussion on Pythagorean cosmology in J. A. Philip, *Pythagoras and Early Pythagoreanism* (Toronto: U of Toronto, 1966), 60-75.

⁴ Ehrhardt, 144

⁵ Plato has *Timaeus* start his discussion with the following words: “We who are now to discourse about the universe . . . must, if our senses be not altogether astray, invoke gods and goddesses with a prayer that our discourse throughout may be above all pleasing to them and in consequence satisfactory to us.” Quoted from F. M. Cornford’s translation in Milton K Munitz, ed., *Theories of the Universe* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1957), 67.

⁶ Ehrhardt, 149.

⁷ Truth in the sense that subjective observations about nature can find universal endorsement, hence the empirical world must be built on objective truth. See discussion in Ehrhardt, 152.

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origins.⁸ Notwithstanding, by the time of the New Testament there were still several cosmological options. Stoic philosophers from Zeno to Epictetus taught that the god of the universe was the creator of the cosmos.⁹ For the Stoics, everything in the universe was a direct result of the interaction between an active cause (God) and a passive cause (matter). Given the preoccupation with the necessity of matter in the process of creation, the notion of a *creatio ex nihilo* was not an option for many. In his treatise, *The Nature of the Universe*, Lucretius boldly states his thesis: “nothing can ever be created by divine power out of nothing” (*nullam rem e nilo gigni divinitus umquam*).¹⁰ However, there were some who dared to stretch logic to its limits and champion the cause of a *creatio ex nihilo*. For example, the physician Galenus purported, “There was nothing earlier from which any ‘beginning’ could have come, but it so happened that prior to the elements there was some invisible, shapeless substance, which the ones call qualityless matter. . . .”¹¹

Jewish thinkers did not absent themselves from philosophical discussions on the beginnings of the universe. Immersed in the Greek world and domiciled in the great centers of learning, some Jewish scholars rejected the biblical account of creation for others they deemed more scientific. Philo of Alexandria set the stage for the later gnostic assertion that a demiurge and not God created the world. In the spirit of Anaxagoras, he proposed two creations: an intellectual and an empirical.¹² Pseudo-Philo also challenged that the world could not be the result of creation, since it is too developed. A created world, he reasoned, “would have been infantile not only physically, but also intellectually.”¹³

With all of these items on the cosmological menu of antiquity, there was still no move towards a consensus about the real beginnings of the universe. In fact, so distraught was the populace on the futility of the philosophers in their search for answers that by the time of Christ many had replaced their theories with religious myths of creation.¹⁴ No philosophic school had been able to advance a scientific argument so compelling that other schools were willing to burn their books and join ranks. The reason for a lack of general consensus is very simple: “. . . there could not be any observed facts when the creation of the universe was enquired into. . . .”¹⁵ As Plato recognized when he penned *Timaeus*, at some point in the discussion of origins, the faith factor must take over.

⁸ Ehrhardt, 154.

⁹ Stoics delineated between the universe and the cosmos. Humans were confined to the latter. See Ehrhardt, 156.

¹⁰ Lucretius, *The Nature of the Universe*, 1.150. Trans. from Munitz, 43.

¹¹ Galenus, *Historia Philosophica*, 21. See comment in Ehrhardt, 164f.

¹² For further discussion see Ehrhardt, 188.

¹³ Ehrhardt, 187.

¹⁴ For full discussion see Ehrhardt, 172-89.

¹⁵ Ehrhardt, 172.

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While Plato desired his readers to find answers in the *Timaeus* myth, the New Testament writers had their own source.

The Scriptural Basis of New Testament Cosmology

Christians today ascribe some level of authority to the New Testament and view it as the second volume of God's revelation to humanity. Many of the distinctive Christian doctrines that differentiate the faith from its Jewish parent are derived from the New Testament. However, these doctrines are often philosophical in nature. For instance, the various Christian doctrines of salvation try to make sense of those texts that refer to salvation as a free gift with the apparently contrary ones that withhold salvation from the person who displays a rebellious spirit. The doctrine of the trinity tries to harmonize the concepts of Jewish monotheism, Jesus' pre-existence, and the Holy Spirit. The New Testament itself is more concerned about interpreting the present and future in relation to the Christ-event than it is about issues of origins and the existential questions of life.

It must not be forgotten that the letters of the New Testament were associated with communities whose only scripture was the First Testament. When Paul wrote, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim 3:16), he was referring exclusively to the First Testament. The New Testament writers were not attempting to rewrite biblical history (as Mohammed apparently attempts in the Koran), but to incite faith in the First Testament as the word of God. The gospel writers are quick to point out how certain events in Jesus' life fulfilled prophecy. In the book of Acts Peter equates the miracle at Pentecost to the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:16-21); Paul understands the inclusion of the Gentiles into the community and the reluctance of some Jews to join as the contemporary realization of various prophecies (Rom 9-11), and even the final book of Scripture is replete with First Testament imagery. Since it was not the intention of the New Testament writers to develop a new religion with a unique cosmology, they accepted the creation account of the First Testament at face value.

It is also obvious that the New Testament authors accepted the First Testament as a book of history. The stories of the New Testament were not seen as etiologies, grandiose myths, or soap opera novels. They were nuggets of reliable information upon which the writers could trace the genealogy of Jesus, anchor the personages of Moses and Elijah, or even muse over the movements of the mystical monarch, Melchizedek. Distanced from the skepticism of the future European "enlightenment" and unscathed by the relativistic uncertainty of historical-critical ideology, the New Testament authors were not hindered by the consensus-setting influence of Julius Wellhausen or Norman Gottwald.¹⁶

The historical veracity of the First Testament comprised both persons and events. Peter refers to the universal flood (1 Pet 3:20); Paul mentions the parting

¹⁶ For a brief but thorough introduction to historical-critical and historical-critical influenced interpretations of the First Testament, see Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 10-34.

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of the Red Sea and the drinking from the spiritual rock (1 Cor 10:1-4); several texts talk about the writing of the law at Sinai. Having experienced the supernatural first hand, it was not difficult to conceive of a God who intervenes in human affairs. Troelstch's principle of correlation, which denies the possibility of Divine intervention in history, would have been as absurd to the New Testament authors as their insistence on the literalness of God's supernatural actions was to Troelstch.¹⁷ Hence, the New Testament references to the Genesis account of creation in the New Testament are not made with explanatory comments or allegorical applications but with *a priori* consensus. With this in mind, the remainder of this section is developed as a New Testament commentary on the Genesis account of creation. Only those sections from which there are direct quotations from or allusions to the creation account will be commented upon.

"In the beginning . . ." (Genesis 1:1). The Bible starts with an unqualified declaration, "In the beginning . . ." The passage that follows makes it clear that what is being described is the beginning of existence in the realm of the cosmos. The New Testament writers accept this as fact. In his discussion about the pre-existent Logos, John declares that the Logos, which would be the instrument through which the worlds were created, was already in existence "in the beginning" (John 1:1). Further, Peter recounts the argument of the skeptics who derided the early Christians for their expectation of an imminent *parousia*: ". . . everything has remained the same from the beginning of creation" (1 Pet 3:4). The fact that there was a beginning is not subject to discussion. In the New Testament, there is no philosophical debate about the nature of empirical reality or metaphysical catalysts. The world began "In the beginning."

"God created/made . . ." (Genesis 1:1). These two words succinctly summarize the "who" and the "how" of things in the physical realm of human experience. The "who" of creation is described in the Hebrew text as *Elohim*, a plural form of the Divine name that many define as a "plural of majesty." Avoiding the difficulties brought on by the plural morphology of *elohim*, the Septuagint translators simply refer to *ho theos* (God) as the creator. Throughout the New Testament, God is heralded as the undisputed agent of creation. In preaching to the Stoics and Epicureans on the Aeropagus, Paul matter-of-factly states that their unknown god was the "God who made the world and everything in it" (Acts 17:24). When predicting the eschatological time of trouble in his apocalyptic speech to the disciples, Jesus warns that it would be the worse seen since "the creation which *God* created" (Mark 13:19). Paul also credits God with the creation of "all things" (Eph 3:9), a thought likewise echoed by John (Rev 4:11).

¹⁷ For a firsthand discussion of the principles of historical criticism, see E. Troeltsch, "Über historische und dogmatische Methode in die Theologie," *Gesammelte Schriften* 2 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1913), 729-53. English discussions are available in Gerhard Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, 1985), 73-78; and the essay on Troelstch by Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Theology and Historical Critical Methodology from Spinoza to Kasemann* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 165.

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In fact, so accepted is the belief that God is creator that not all find it necessary to mention His name when talking about things created. Speaking primarily in the context of idolatry, Paul prophesies judgment on those who worship the creature rather than the “one who created” (Rom 1:25), and Peter provides the sole voice who utilizes the noun *ktistes* (Creator) as a synonym for the Almighty (1 Pet 4:19).

A slight problem arises with those New Testament texts that appear to deviate from the First Testament passages and attribute creation to the pre-existent Christ, who is a separate entity from God the Father (John 1:3; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2). The problem is bridged when it is recognized that nowhere is Christ referred to as the Creator. John, Paul, and Hebrews all state that the world was made “through” (*dia*) the Logos/Son. This highlights the pre-existent Son as a sort of middle-man in the process. Hebrews is irrefutably clear that God is the chief actor in creation (Heb 1:1f). The pre-human Son appears to be a part of a Divine creation team that God repeatedly addresses with the hortatory command, “Let us . . .” This is the same team God addresses in Genesis 3:22 when He implies that Adam would gain Divine status if he were to eat from the tree of life. In some mysterious way, the pre-existent Divine Son had an intermediary role in the creation process, but God is the ultimate Creator.

The “how” of the beginning is described as the simple act of God doing it. When understood with reference to any type of creation, the Hebrew *bara'* is reserved for divine activity. The method of creating is not defined in the word itself; however, when viewed in the context of Genesis 1 and 2, *bara'* can involve the simple act of God speaking things into existence, or it may involve the actual construction of a creature from already existing material.¹⁸ Although the term *ktizō*, the Greek equivalent of *bara'*, was obviously known to the Septuagint translators,¹⁹ they chose to translate *bara'* in Genesis 1:1 with the verb *poieō*. *Poieō* conveys the standard meaning of “do” or “make” and is not as specific as *ktizō*. Apart from Paul in his discourse on the Aeropagus and the first angel of Revelation 14, who apparently allude to Genesis 1:1 when referring to the God who made (*poieō*) the world (Acts 17:24; Rev 14:7), most of the New Testament writers tend to substitute the *poieō* of the Septuagint’s rendering of Genesis 1:1 for the seemingly more appropriate *ktizō*. Mark speaks pointedly of the creation God created (Mark 13:19). Paul speaks of God as “the one who creates” (Rom 1:25) and “the one who creates all things” (Eph 3:9). Peter calls him the “faithful creator” (1 Pet 4:19), and John pens the words of a hymn to the one “who created all things through His will” (Rev 4:11). In addition to *poieō* and *ktizō*, the verb *ginomai* (to become) is sometimes used to describe the creation process. John proclaims, “All things came into existence (*egeneto*) through (*dia*)

¹⁸ This is definitely the impression given in Gen 1:20 and 24: “Let the earth/water bring forth.” And Gen 2:7ff irrefutably states that Adam was made from dirt.

¹⁹ See Gen 14:19 and 22, which both refer to the God who “created the heaven and the earth” (*ektisen tou ouranon kai tōn gēn*).

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the Word” (John 1:3), and Jesus in Mark states, “The Sabbath came into existence (*egeneto*) for (*dia*) humans” (Mark 2:27).

“Heaven(s) and earth” (Genesis 1:1; 2:1). If the phrase “God made” describes the “who” and “how” of creation, the expression “heaven and earth” describes the “what” of creation. This serves as an all-encompassing term for everything contained in the realm of the cosmos.²⁰ While both the Hebrew Bible and the LXX agree that there is only one earth (*’ereṣ*, *gē*), the Hebrew suggests a plurality of heavens (*šamayim*), in contrast to the lone heaven of the LXX. Later Jewish thinkers took the reference to plural heavens seriously and often spoke of seven heavens.²¹ Even Paul speaks about a man he knew who was caught up into the “third heaven” (2 Cor 12:2) and refers to the creation of all things in the “heavens” (*ouranois*) and the earth (Col 1:16). In spite of these arguments, it does appear that since both accounts in Genesis 1:1 are referring to the physical structure of the observable universe, heaven(s) is an obvious reference to the atmosphere.

The two-fold division of the universe is echoed in some parts of the New Testament. It has just been noted that Paul refers to the creation of “everything that is in the heavens and on the earth.”²² In Acts, Luke also reports Paul’s reference to the one who is Lord of “heaven and earth.”²³ Other statements relating to the division of the universe have been influenced by the reference to creation that appears in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, where the universe is said to consist of “heaven,” “earth,” and “sea” (Exod 20:8-11). This tripartite division is also utilized in the New Testament. In Revelation 10:6, John describes God as the one “who created the heaven and the things in it, the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it.” Some may even argue for a four-part division in the first angel’s call for the worship of the one who made “the heaven and the earth, the sea and the fountains of water” (Rev 14:7). Notwithstanding, all of these references aim to incorporate the totality of God’s creation during the six days of creative activity.²⁴

Creation did not only result in the appearance of physical objects, but also involved the establishment of invisible phenomena. The principle of “rulership” (*archē*) was first established on the fourth day of creation week when the “lesser light” was granted jurisdiction over the night and the “greater light” was assigned to the day (Gen 1:16ff). Again, on the sixth day, God invested humans with rulership (*archē*) over all animal and plant life (Gen 1:26ff). While Genesis mentions only “rulership” as a part of the created order, Paul, in Colossians

²⁰ See Lawrence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 2000), 21, and Claus Westerman, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 8.

²¹ E.g. *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, 7:1-11:33.

²² Col 1:16. The plural *ouranois* suggests influence from the Hebrew.

²³ Acts 17:24. The singular *ouranou* suggests influence from the LXX.

²⁴ See Jon Paulien, “Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” *JATS* 9 (1998), 179-186.

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1:16, reasons that the “invisible” creation also includes “thrones, lords, and authorities” (*thronoi, kuriotētes, exousia*).

“The earth was without form and empty” / “The earth was invisible and not yet prepared” (Gen 1:2). Genesis 1:2 is the sole text that describes the earth immediately before creation. The Hebrew Bible and LXX provide apparently contrasting accounts of the pre-creation world. The Hebrew states that the earth was “formless and empty” (*tōhū wa bōhū*), possibly giving the false impression that it was a gigantic misshaped blob, but in any case indicating its existence. The LXX depicts it as “invisible and not yet prepared” (*aoratos kai akataskeuatos*), which might suggest that absolutely nothing existed before God started creating on day one. It is highly probable that the LXX translators were aware of the philosophical discussion on beginnings and knew that virtually all cosmogonies to that point supported creation from matter. Nonetheless, they appear to have reversed the Hebrew expression *tōhū wa bōhū* and translated *bōhū* with *aoratos*, setting the stage for the concept of a *creatio ex nihilo*. Some may argue that this concept is inherent in the successive verses, where the divine formula “let there be” appears to be sufficient for the creation of earthly entities.

The New Testament does not shed much light on how this verse was understood by the early Christians. The only linguistic support for a *creatio ex nihilo* from the Genesis account of creation comes from the Septuagint’s use of *aorata* (invisible). The term itself only appears five times in the New Testament: twice with reference to God (Heb 11:27, 1 Tim 1:17), and three times in the context of creation, but never to describe the pre-creation state of the earth. In Romans 1:20, Paul declares that God’s invisible nature can be discerned through the material things He created. In Colossians 1:15, Jesus is described as “the image [*eikon*] of the invisible God, the first born of all creation.” In fact, as was discussed above, Col 1:16 gives the impression that invisible “things” themselves can be created.

Probably, the closest one comes to a text supporting a *creatio ex nihilo* is Hebrews 11:3, where the author states, “By faith we perceive that the world was prepared by the word of God, so that out of things that are not apparent came the things that we currently see.”²⁵ However, the things that are not apparent (*to mē ek phainomenon*) do not necessarily refer to invisible things. They could easily be things that had not yet been shaped into their final form. Given the probability that the author of Hebrews had access to the LXX,²⁶ he could have used *aorata* had he desired to express his belief in a *creatio ex nihilo*. Based on the absence of any direct quotation from the LXX, it appears that Hebrews 11:3 offers an interpretation of the ambiguous *tōhū wa bōhū* of the Hebrew text. As

²⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 279, writes, “. . . the writer to the Hebrews is more biblical in his reasoning and affirms the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, a doctrine uncongenial to Greek thought.”

²⁶ The probability is heightened by the fact that Heb 2:6-8 mirrors the LXX rendering of Ps 8:4-6 with the use of *angeloi* instead of *elohim*, as is found in the Hebrew text.

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such, it does not preclude the possibility of creation from pre-existing substance.²⁷

“Let there be light” (Gen 1:3). After the two verse introduction, details are provided about the specific items that were created on each day of creation. The New Testament does not discuss every particular about creation, so the commentary will be rather brief and sketchy until day six.

The first phenomenon to be created is light. This light contrasts with the darkness that covered the face of the deep in 1:2. It is a light independent of the elemental lights found in the sun and the stars (1:14-19). There are two references to this event in the New Testament. Paul’s analogical use of this event to demonstrate how God shines in the life of the believer reveals his understanding that this part of the creation was solely effected by God’s command (2 Cor 4:6). A further allusion is made in John 1:5, where the antithetical relationship between light and darkness is highlighted, and light is portrayed as the stronger of the two.

“Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into one” (Gen 1:9). The New Testament contains no explicit mention of the second day of creation, but has several references to the third. It was on the third day that dry land and sea were separated. The impression is given in Gen 1:9 that before day three, the earth was nothing but water. Indeed, Gen 1:2 describes the pre-creation cosmos as one in which “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” When referring to this event, Peter states, “the earth was formed out of water and by means of water” (1 Pet 3:5). Other references to the third day have been covered under the commentary on the phrase “heaven and earth,” where it was shown that some Bible writers transform the two compartment world into a tripartite division by adding “sea” as the third essential domicile for living entities.

“Let us make *man* in our image . . . (and) likeness . . .” (Gen 1:26-27). On the sixth day of creation, God led the creation team in the creation of humans who were to be made in the divine image. It is commonly accepted that image and likeness refer more to the spiritual image of the Divine council than to any physical manifestation. Paul appears to be the only New Testament writer to allude to this text. In Rom 1:23 he uses the LXX terms *homoīēmati ekeinos* to describe the idolatrous practice of those who exchanged the glory of God for the likeness of perishable humans. Further, in 2 Cor 4:4, Christ is heralded as the image (*eikōn*) of God. That image is not understood in terms of physicality is demonstrated in Colossians 1:15, where Christ is called the image of the *invisible* God. Elsewhere, when establishing a hierarchy between man and woman,

²⁷ See Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 315f. Less debatable in the discussion over the use of pre-existent matter in creation is the record of the creation of the first humans. Genesis 1:27 simply states that God created humans in His image and provides no further details about the method. However, verse 24 begins with the command, “let the earth bring forth zoological life.” The role of the earth in the creation of humans is further discussed in Gen 2:7, where it is recorded that the first man was created from a mound of dirt.

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Paul states that the male is “the image and glory of God” (1 Cor 11:7). Interestingly, in this text Paul does not consider woman to be the “image of God” but rather the “glory of man.” This evidences a strict reading of Genesis 1:27, which states, “God created *man* in his own image, in the image of God he created *him*, male and female he created them.”²⁸ There is no reference to both of *them* being created in his image.²⁹ While James does not address the issue of the *imago Dei*, if he uses *anthrōpoi* generically, he appears to suggest that all humans share the “likeness” of God when he writes, “with [the tongue] we bless the Lord and Father and with it we curse humans/men (*anthrōpous*) who were made in the likeness (*homoīēsin*) of God” (James 3:9).

“[The LORD] God formed a dust man from the earth” (Gen 2:7). Details about the creation of the man are given in Gen 2, where the events of the sixth day are covered with greater specificity. Whereas the report on the sixth day in Genesis 1 begins with the command, “Let the earth [*gē*] bring forth zoological life according to its kind,” Gen 2 provides the specifics about the events of the day. The task of making the man actually involved piling up dirt (*choun*) from the earth (*gē*) and shaping it into a torso before applying the breath necessary for the man to become alive (2:7). Paul cites this account of Adam’s creation in 1 Cor 15 when discussing the effects of the two prototypical “men” (*anthrōpoi*) on the human race (1 Cor 15:42-49). The first man is described as “dirt from the earth” (*ek gēs choikos*), as opposed to the second man from heaven. According to Paul, all humans have been constantly wearing the “image of the dirt man” (1 Cor 15:49).

“The man became a living soul” (Gen 2:7). This phrase serves to link the creation of humans to the hortatory command that commenced the sixth day of creation in Gen 1:24, where the original reads, “Let the earth bring forth *psuchēn zōsan / nepheš hāyyāh*.” In a previous note, *psuchēn zōsan / nepheš hāyyāh* was translated “zoological life.” In keeping with traditional interpretations it is translated here as “living soul,” but the meaning is the same. In the New Testament, Paul contrasts the “first man, Adam, [who] became a living soul” with “the last Adam [who became] a life giving spirit” (1 Cor 15:45).

“Male and female, He created them” (Gen 1:27). Although only the man is credited with possessing the image of God at creation, both male and female were created by Him. The LXX uses the generic adjectives *arsen kai thēlu* (male and female) to describe the first humans to be created. These adjectives relate strictly to sexual distinctions and apply to animals as well as humans.³⁰ In his

²⁸ See also Gen 5:1-2: “. . . the day God made Adam, after the image of God he made him; male and female he made them and blessed them.”

²⁹ For a discussion on Paul’s use of the First Testament in 1 Cor 11, see Keith A. Burton, “1 Corinthians 11 and 14: How Does a Woman Prophecy and Keep Silence at the Same Time?” *JATS* 10 (1999): 268-284.

³⁰ For examples of animals described with the adjectives *arsen* and/or *thēlu*, see Gen 6:20; 7:2-3, 9, 16; Exod 12:5; Lev 1:3, 10; and Mal 1:14.

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discussion with the Pharisees on divorce, Jesus asks, “Have you not read that the one who created from the beginning made them male and female?” (Matt 19:4). This is an obvious reference to the Tanak scroll which was “read aloud” (*anegnōte*) in public worship.³¹ Although the scroll would more than likely have been in Hebrew, both Matthew and Mark (10:6) use the phrase from the LXX when referring to the creation of the first humans. Paul also uses the adjectives in Gal 3:28 in his discussion of soteriological unity in Christ Jesus. It is interesting to note that he appears to lift the phrase directly from the LXX and does not even amend the conjunction *kai* with *oude* to balance the opposites with the others in the sequence. It appears that Paul understood the sexual differences to be for the purpose of heterosexual copulation. Utilizing forms of the adjectives from Gen 1:27, he speaks of “[homosexual] women [*thēleias*] exchanging natural intercourse for unnatural, and [homosexual] men [*arsenes*] leaving natural intercourse with women [*thēleias*] burning with desire for one another . . .” (Rom 1:26-27). As far as the New Testament witness is concerned, God created sexual opposites for a purpose, and any other union is against the created order.³²

“I will make a helper for him” (Gen 2:18). The creation of the woman is described in Gen 2:18-22, where Eve is built around the frame of one of Adam’s sides. This account makes it plain that woman and man were made at different times, albeit on the same day. Like their First Testament predecessors, the New Testament writers took literally the understanding of woman being made as the *boēthos* (helper) for man. As a rationale for a hierarchy in the Divine and created order, Paul appeals to the sequence of creation: “For man is not from woman, but woman from man; for man was not created because of woman, but woman because of man” (1 Cor 11:8-9).³³ And when he tackles the issue of female subordination in the ecclesiastical context, he reminds his readers that “Adam was formed (*eplasthē*) first, then Eve” (1 Tim 2:13).

“The two shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). When Eve is brought to Adam, he affirms, “This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). The statement is not to be taken overly literally, since while it is true that God removed a part of Adam’s anatomy, the woman was “built up” around it, suggesting that she too was molded from the dirt. From the context of the passage, Adam’s statement is probably intended to differentiate the woman from the other zoological forms that were created that day.³⁴ The passage concludes, “Because of this a man shall leave behind his father and his mother and be glued (*proskollēthēsetai*) to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This includes the ideas of independence, marriage (interdependence), and procreation

³¹ On Jesus’ use of the creation story, see Keith A. Burton, “A Christian Theology of Divorce and Remarriage,” *Ministry* 74/4 (2001): 20-22.

³² See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* 1-8 (Dallas: Word, 1988), 64-66.

³³ For commentary, see Burton, “1 Corinthians 14.”

³⁴ Turner (*Genesis*, 29) implies that this is inherent in Adam’s statement, “This at last . . . !”

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and is directly quoted in two contexts in the New Testament. The first is by Jesus, who when arguing against divorce with the Pharisees uses the concept of “one flesh” to establish the insolubility of the marriage (Matt 19:5; Mark 10:7). The verse is also quoted by Paul, who uses the passage to explain the marital roles of husband and wife and the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:31).

“And [God] rested on the seventh day from all His works” (Gen 2:2).

God’s creation of the universe was completed in six days. It was mentioned earlier that “heaven(s) and earth” in Gen 1:1 is intended to be an all-inclusive phrase to introduce the details of the six days of creation. Now, as the activity is terminated, the same phrase is echoed in Gen 2:1 to serve as an *inclusio* to the section. The cessation of God’s activity was marked by the “blessing” and “sanctifying” of the first ever evening and morning period in which no work was conducted (Gen 2:3). In Heb 4:4, the author quotes from Genesis 2:2 to establish a rationale for his pronouncement that “a Sabbath keeping (*sabbatismos*) remains for the people of God” (Heb 4:9).³⁵ Given the uniqueness of this universe, the Sabbath appears to be a phenomenon that may be limited to the sphere of human/earthly reality. This is inherent in Jesus’ declaration that the “Sabbath came into existence (*egeneto*) for humans” (Mark 2:27).

Conclusion

Having examined the New Testament references to Gen 1 and 2, we can have no doubt that the early Christian writers accepted the creation account of the First Testament at face value. They quote from it authoritatively and have no problem in building doctrine and conducting heuristic exegesis from the creation story. Although surrounded by a vast array of philosophical and religious options upon which to build a cosmology, they chose to embrace the biblical record. They did not even appear to be tempted to follow in the path of Philo or his pseudonymous admirer who felt the need to present a cosmology that would be more palatable to the philosophical minds of the dominant culture.

What stopped the New Testament writers from embracing some of the scientific theories that were circulating in their day? It was their *faith*. This was not a blind faith that rejected indisputable scientific evidence. It was a reasoned faith. Even a casual perusal of the writings of Paul, the author of Hebrews, and James illuminates the fact that many of the New Testament writers were intelligent and skilled in logical reasoning. However, they were also wise enough to know that nobody can scientifically determine the origin of reality as we know it. Hence, the author of Hebrews, when contemplating the reality of the universe

³⁵ This is a much debated passage. However, many downplay the significance of the sole use of *sabbatismos* in the Bible and its etymological relationship to *sabbatizo*. It is also likely that Heb 4:10 intends to show that those who are serious about entering into *katapausis* are in the habit of resting from works in the same manner as God did in the first week—implying a keeping of the Sabbath.

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and the numerous entities therein, admits that it is only “by *faith* that we believe the worlds were created by the Word of God” (Heb 11:3). Although there were a number of cosmological documents in which he could have placed his faith, he chose to exercise faith in the cosmological account of the First Testament.

It is almost two thousand years since the New Testament writers commented on the biblical account of creation. Many advances have been made in the field of science. With the Copernican revolution we moved from a geocentric to a heliocentric view of the universe. Marconi, Edison, McCoy, and a host of others have fueled technological strides that seem to be limitless. Rapid progress in genetics and the vast possibilities opened up with DNA research has provided a boost for proponents of scientific certainty. However, none of the scientific discoveries have ended the quest to settle the troubling questions of origin.

In their desperate bid to find conclusive answers, many modern philosophers have deluded themselves into thinking that certain scientific theories are probable enough to be considered fact. So certain are they about evolutionary hypotheses that governments and private foundations have devoted billions of dollars to further research in this area. They fail to realize that the research focuses on testing hypotheses that can *never* be empirically verified. In spite of the complicated formulas and compelling theories used to “prove” a hypothesis, the fact that it cannot be empirically verified means that at the end of the experiment it still remains a hypothesis. At the end of empiricism one is forced to enter the realm of faith. The inquiring Christian in the twenty-first century is forced to come to terms with this. There will always be questions about observable phenomena that have no answer in scripture. There will always be multi-volume dissertations that make convincing (tautological?) arguments in support of previously held evolutionary hypotheses. However, when all is said and done we are forced to answer the question that Yahweh posed to Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (Job 38:4). We are forced to admit our ignorance. We are forced to admit that when it comes to origins, the entire human race is ignorant. The only way to pacify our ignorance is by exercising faith. The question is, “In what will you place your faith?”

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